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BROWN WILLIAM  
THE POWER OF THE HARP  
AND  
OTHER BALLADS

BY  
GEORGE BORROW

LONDON :  
PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

1913



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## BROWN WILLIAM

*This ballad was written in consequence of the execution of William Christian, generally called William Donn, or Brown William, from the darkness of his complexion, who was shot at Hango Hill, near Castletown, in the Isle of Man, shortly after the Restoration, for alleged treason to the Derby family, who long possessed the sovereignty of Man. . . . The ballad of "Brown William," which gives an account of the betrayal of the poor patriot, and the vengeance taken by the hand of God upon his murderers, is the most popular of all the wild songs of Ellan Vannin.*

LET no one in greatness too confident be,  
Nor trust in his kindred, though high their  
degree ;  
For envy and rage will lay any man low :  
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with  
woe.

Thou wast the Receiver of Mona's fair state,  
Thy conduct was noble, thy wisdom was great,  
And ne'er of thy rule did she weariness show :  
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with  
woe.

Thy right hand was Earley, and Theah thy right  
eye ;

Thy state caused thy foemen with rage to swell  
high ;

And envy and rage will lay any man low :

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with  
woe.

How blest thy condition in fair Ronaldsway !

Thy mansion, how stately ! thy garden, how gay !

But oh ! what disasters from envy do flow :

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with  
woe.

'Twas said at thy trial, by men void of faith,

The king, by a letter, demanded thy death ;

The jury was frighten'd, and dared not say "No !"

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with  
woe.

The clan of wild Colcad could ne'er be at rest

Whilst the race of Christeen their own acres  
possess'd ;

And envy and spite will bring any man low :

Thy murder Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

A band of adulterers, curst and unholy,  
For Ronaldsway lust, as they did for Lough  
Molley ;  
Of Naboth, the tragedy's played here anew :  
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with  
woe.

Not one of the band but received his just meed,  
Who acted a part in that damnable deed ;  
To dwindle away the whole band was not slow :  
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with  
woe.

To Callaghyn-doo, and to Vannyster roam,  
And call on the Colcad till hoarse ye become ;  
Gone, gone is the name so well known long ago :  
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with  
woe.

A cripple was Robin for many years long,  
Who troubled and bullied the island when strong ;  
His own friends of tending him weary did grow :  
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with  
woe.

Sly Richard took ship with thy blood on his  
hand,

But God can avenge on the sea as on land ;

The waves would not bear him, but whelm'd  
him, I trow :

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with  
woe.

And now, if a few of the seed do remain,

They're vile as the thistles and briars on the  
plain ;

They ply for their neighbours the pick and the  
hoe :

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with  
woe.

Should ye walk through all Man you'll find no  
one, I reckon,

To mourn for the name that was once in  
Beemachan ;

But thousands of poor who rejoice that 'tis low :

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with  
woe.

Proceed to Creganyn, and Balla-logh green,  
But where's there a Colcad to bid ye walk in ?  
By strangers their homes and their lands are  
held now :

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with  
woe.

Great Scarlett, in wealth who dwelt down by the  
bay,

Must toil now with paupers for sixpence a-day ;  
And oft, as I've heard, has no morsel to chew :

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with  
woe.

The band by whose weapons the great Cæsar  
died

Were hunted by foes, and all peace were denied ;  
Not one died the death of kind Nature, O, no !

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with  
woe.

So it fared with the band by whom Willie did  
die,

Their lands are a waste, their names stink to the  
sky ;

They melted like rime in the ruddy sun's glow :  
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with  
woe.

But comfort I take, for 'tis common report  
There are shoots of dear Will who are sitting at  
court,  
Who have punished his foes by king's mandate,  
although  
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with  
woe.

O, 'tis pleasant to think, when one's wither'd and  
grey,  
There's race of Brown William in fair Ronalds-  
way,  
That his foemen are crush'd, and their faces can't  
show,  
While the clan of Christeen have no trouble or  
woc.\*

\* Here the old ballad—I speak of the original Manx—concludes. The two following stanzas are comparatively modern.

To the counsellors false, both in church and in  
state,  
Bear the public of Mona both loathing and hate,  
Who set man against man, and the peace would  
break now,  
As thy murder, Brown William, broke hearts  
long ago.

The lord of our island, Duke Athol the great,  
They would gladly persuade, with their parle  
and their prate,  
The corner-stones high of his house to lay low,  
And to King, Duke and Mona are foemen, I  
trow.

## THE POWER OF THE HARP

SIR PETER would forth from the castle ride,  
Grieving and weeping did sit his young bride.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so ?*

“ Art grieving for saddle, or steed black or white,  
Or because I have wed thee art thou in this  
plight ? ”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so ?*

“ I grieve not for saddle, or steed black or white,  
Nor because thou hast wed me am I in this  
plight.”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so ?*



“Dost sorrow because little wealth I have got,  
Or dost sorrow because thine equal I'm not?”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so?*

“I sorrow not because little of wealth thou hast  
got,  
Nor grieve I because thou mine equal art not.”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so?*

“Dost sorrow because thy fond father is dead,  
Or dost sorrow because thou'rt no longer a  
maid?”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so?*

“I grieve not because my dear father is dead,  
Nor sorrow I because that I am not a maid.”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so?*

“I grieve and I weep, and to grieve I have need,  
I know but too well what for me is decreed.”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so?*

“For the bridge, the broad bridge, I sorrow much  
more,

For oh! my five sisters together fell o’er.”

*Belov’d of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so?*

“I think of the stream, and I sorrow much more,  
My sisters sank in it and never rose more.”

*Belov’d of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so?*

“My dearest, my dearest, cast sorrow aside,  
Before thee shall twelve of my merry men ride.”

*Belov’d of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so?*

“Before thee shall twelve of my merry men  
speed,

And I will myself hold the reins of thy steed.”

*Belov’d of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so?*

And when they arrived in the green forest shade  
A hart they beheld at gold tables that played.

*Belov’d of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so?*

All stopped at the strange brown hart to take  
    heed,

And allowed the young bride by herself to proceed.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
    so ?*

And as the broad bridge she went galloping o'er,  
Stumbled her steed on his golden shoes four.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
    so ?*

Golden shoes four, each with golden nails three,  
And the bride was cast into the boiling sea.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
    so ?*

Sir Peter he turned at her terrified cry,  
But the bride she had sunk 'neath the waters  
    high.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
    so ?*

He called to his men as their hands they wring :  
"Bring quickly my harp with the golden string !"

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
    so ?*

Sir Peter began with such sweetness to play,  
That the birds all sang as they sat on the spray.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so ?*

The Merman rose from the depths of the sea,  
And the fair young bride by the hand led he.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so ?*

“ Sir Peter, Sir Peter, thy playing give o'er,  
Thy beautiful bride to thy arms I restore.”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so ?*

“ For my bonny bride only I will not give o'er,  
Her five sisters also thou must restore.”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so ?*

Anew 'gan Sir Peter so sweetly to play,  
That the birds came down from their seat on the  
spray.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so ?*

The Merman arose from the depth of the sea,  
Five pretty maids by the hand led he.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so ?*

“Sir Peter, Sir Peter, thy playing give o'er,  
For in truth have I now no maidens more.”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so ?*

From her anguish now is the Lady free,  
In the arm of Sir Peter each night sleeps she.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou  
so ?*

## THE UNFORTUNATE MARRIAGE

HILDEBRAND gave his sister away,  
Causing her many a mournful day.

She was given away and evilly wed,  
Joy from her bosom quickly fled.

On Sunday she was a graceful bride,  
On Monday a prisoner sad she sigh'd.

“ O what, my Lord, have I done to thee ? ”

“ Woman, I had no gold with thee.

“ This have I, Dame, to say to thee,  
Thou brought'st no silver home to me.”

“ Thou knowest I brought thee as my dower  
Eight full coffers to thy bower.

“ Two filled with silver, white to see,  
And two with gold so ruddy of blee.

“ Two filled with sable and mard skins rare,  
And two with pelts of deer and of bear.

“ Upon thy father I bestow'd  
Gilded saddle and courser proud.

“ Upon thy mother did I bestow  
Scarlet to place her feet below.

“ To thy brother a ship from off the wave,  
To your sister gold from my breast I gave.

“ All thy courtiers I have dight  
With little shirts as ivory white.

“ No serving lass in the house is there  
But I gave her silk to snood her hair.

“ With what, my Lord, canst me upbraid,  
And why in durance am I laid ? ”

“ Woman, to thee I've this to say,  
Thy brothers my father slew in fray.”

“ If my brothers a deed so dire did dare,  
I in that deed did in no ways share.

“ And thou for thy father’s death wast paid  
Seven tons of silver, and golden braid.

“ What more, my Lord, canst thou require,  
To remove from me thy anger dire ? ”

“ Woman, with this I thee upbraid,  
Thou can’st not into my bed a maid.”

“ So lend me, God, in my trouble aid,  
As I came into thy bed a maid !

“ And may God never give me grace,  
If I came not a maid to thy embrace.”

“ To-day thou shalt sit within and mourn,  
To-morrow at dawn on faggots burn.”

There she sits and her hands she wrings,  
Till she heard the clang of the Raven’s wings.

“ O Raven, Raven, stay thy wing,  
Can’st thou the tune of the watchman sing ? ”



“ O well can I, and well I ought,  
So little was I when the tune I caught.”

“ Wilt fly for me, Raven, to Tonne town,  
For there my friends and kindred wone ?

“ I’ll give thee, Raven, a red gold band,  
To carry my message to Hildebrand.

“ A red gold band I’ll give to thee,  
To tell him the tale of my misery.”

“ Thy gold will do me little good,  
Dearer to me my raven food.”

“ O Raven, if thou wilt fly for me,  
My husband’s eyes shall be thy fee.”

Abroad his black wings the Raven threw,  
And over three kingly realms he flew.

The Raven into the chamber sped,  
Where Hildebrand drank the wine so red.

“ Hear thou, Hildebrand the young,  
Thy sister’s into durance flung.

“ Here art thou sitting and drinking wine,  
To-morrow they’ll burn sweet sister thine.”

Hildebrand sprang the table o’er,  
Dashing the wine on the marble floor.

Hildebrand hies him into the stall,  
There he beholds the coursers all.

He viewed the brown, and the gray as well,  
On the black he laid the gilded selle.

“ Blacklille, Blacklille, if me thou’lt bear,  
Thou on winnowed wheat all thy days shalt fare.”

“ Then willingly, willingly, thee I’ll bear,  
But to breathe my name thou must not dare.”

He placed himself Blacklille’s back upon,  
And across the sea then away he ran.

And when to the midst of the Sound they came,  
He in evil hour uttered Blacklille’s name.

Blacklille quickly swam to the land,  
But down to the bottom sank Hildebrand.

On the Ting stood the damsel at break of day,  
Then heard she afar off Blacklille neigh.

Blacklille ran towards the Ting in wrath,  
Back scattered both women and men from  
his path.

Blacklille he kicked, the Raven he hewed,  
With the blood of men was his beak embrued.

Black took on his back the fair young dame,  
He went from the Ting and with her was tame.

And when they reached the yellow sand,  
Upon it was standing Hildebrand.

"Welcome, sweet Kirsten, dear sister mine,  
Why is so pallid that cheek of thine?"

"The reason my cheek so pale is seen,  
Is because I've far from my dear home been."

"Now let no honest man," she said,  
"Into foreign lands his daughter wed.

"Of gold perhaps he may get a store,  
But her happiness goeth for evermore."

Hildebrand kissed her o'er and o'er :

"My darling sister, pray sorrow no more.

"Kirsten, I pray thee, pardon me  
For bringing thee into this misery."

Then spake Blacklille as he stood :

"I've saved thee by shedding human blood.

"Give me, Kirsten, one little kiss,  
And the Raven one on that beak of his."

On their mouths she kissed them both with  
glee—

From hideous thrall were they both set free.

She kissed them both with good will, I ween,  
They changed to her brothers who lost had  
been.

They all pressed her fondly to their breast,  
From sorrow and woe she is now at rest.

## THE WRESTLING-MATCH

As one day I wandered lonely, in extreme  
distress of mind,

I a pleasant garden entered, hoping comfort  
there to find.

Up and down I paced the garden till an open  
space I spied,

There I saw a crowd of people, and I heard a  
voice that cried :

“ Come and see what Love is doing, here is Love  
performing more

Wondrous feats than e'er were witnessed at  
Olympian games of yore :

This he conquers, that he conquers, young and  
old before him lie,

Great and small alike he conquers, none with  
him a fall must try.

Hearing this at once I entered 'midst the crowd  
collected there,  
Some of whom no doubt were eager like myself  
to banish care.  
I would fain behold this being, this same  
wondrous lad survey,  
Who 'twas said in each encounter bore with ease  
the prize away.  
Quickly I the crowd divided, soon I pierced the  
multitude,  
And this Love stood full before me, and what  
think you 'twas I view'd?  
Why a boy, a little darling, full of captivating  
grace,  
Rather roguish were his glances, but how lovely  
was his face !

Soon as I beheld this warrior gibings I began to  
throw  
At the wretches who had suffered fell defeat  
from such a foe.

Then, to me his visage turning, of the conquered  
standing by

One replied, and in replying tears he shed  
abundantly :

“ O, poor youth,” ’twas thus he answered, “ little,  
little dost thou know

That in coming here thou comest not to joy,  
but bitter woe.

Tears, and pains, and wounds most ghastly,  
wounds for which there is no cure,

Every kind of evil treatment such as no one can  
endure.”

When these words I heard him utter I was filled  
with bitter rage,

And forthwith made preparation with the warrior  
to engage.

“ Hearken, Master Love,” I shouted, “ from this  
spot stir not away,

You and I must have a battle, must engage in  
deadly fray ;

That it may be known for certain which is  
strongest of us two."

Then into the arena bounding there I stood in  
all men's view,

In the midst of it expecting firm the onset of  
the foe,

Doubting not should he attack me him at once  
to overthrow.

Love he was not slow to follow with a blythe  
and joyous air,

Crying out, "My dearest fellow, for the fight  
yourself prepare!

Round the waist each other clasping now let's  
strive like wrestlers true,

Do your best and I will show you what young  
Master Love can do."

Then around the waist I clasped him, he his  
arms around me wound,

Long we hugged and hugged each other, each  
his match in t'other found.



Said at length the urchin to me : " Sadly tired,  
friend, am I,

Very much fatigued and weary, really friend  
just fit to die.

Therefore take from me, I prythee, what thou  
anxiously hast sought,

And for which in this arena with me gallantly  
hast fought."

Then a blast of wild consuming fire he breathed  
into my breast,

Straight my breast it quick enkindled, all  
deprived was I of rest,

Then he ran away exulting to some other  
wretched wight,

Such a zest he has for conflict, in such fray is  
his delight.

As for me I fell half senseless on the fatal, fatal  
spot,

Fierce consuming fire within me, never sure was  
one so hot.

Rising up I followed shrieking, "Oh have  
mercy, Love, on me !

See my tears, my sad affliction, cure me of my  
misery !"

Then he cried, "Dost not remember all the  
boasts thy lips out-pour'd ?

Know henceforth in every region Love is  
Conqueror and Lord."

Thus he cried, and proudly left me, and wherever  
now I rove,

I reproach myself for thinking I could vanquish  
mighty Love.

## THE WARRIOR

*From the Arabic.*

THOU lov'st to look on myrtles green,  
And the narcissus bright of hue ;  
I love the blaze of sabres keen,  
I love the dagger's flash to view.

Thou, thou may'st drink the rosy wine  
From golden goblets sculptured o'er ;  
From foemen's skulls the joy be mine  
To drink my foemen's reeking gore.

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